Chairperson: **Patrick J. Bourne**
Committee: **Judiciary**
Date of Hearing: **February 25, 2005**

The following constitutes the reasons for this bill and the purposes which are sought to be accomplished thereby:

LB 724 attempts to address many of the assessment and investigation problems that exist within the State's child welfare system. From 1997 to 2003 at least 33 children have been killed at the hands of a parent, relative, or other caregiver. This year the Foster Care Review Board examined the 22,648 intake reports recorded on N-FOCUS from July 2002 to July 2003. The Board conducted research on a sample of 6,000 of these child abuse or neglect calls and found that even though 40% of the calls should have had further action, only 25% of the calls did.

The main problem with our existing system seems to be one of accountability. The initial intake of reports of child abuse is flawed. The system is overburdened. Supervision and quality control measures are not what they should be. The responsibilities for intake assessment, investigation and referral to services are fragmented. Communication is poor.

LB 724 would create a pilot project in western Nebraska. This pilot project would create an investigation and prosecution center under the authority of the Attorney General. This center would be headed by an assistant attorney general. In counties with a separate juvenile court, the county attorney would be responsible. A line of authority within this center would ensure coordination amoung intake, investigation and services.

A significant component of the bill is training. All personnel involved with screening, investigating and handling calls of child abuse and negect, including law enforcement officers and child abuse investigators, will have to complete a skill-based traing program. LB 724 also calls for the Foster Care Review Board to continue its function of external review.

Principal Introducer: _____
                                   Senator Arnie M. Stuthman